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News Releases - 2007

Celia Franca: a life devoted to classical dance in Canada

Ottawa, February 19, 2007– The Canada Council for the Arts joins the nation's dance community in mourning the passing of Celia Franca, dancer, choreographer, founder and artistic director of the National Ballet of Canada, who died today at the age of 85.

Ms. Franca played a key role in the establishment of classical dance in Canada, and was a member of the board of the Canada council from 1982 to 1989. She was born in England, and moved to Canada and founded the National Ballet of Canada in 1951. During the early years, she brought guest artists over from Europe to perform in her ballets. In 1959, she joined forces with British teacher Betty Oliphant to create the National Ballet School and train Canadian dancers for the company.

Ms. Franca was the recipient of numerous awards and honours, and in 1967 she became the first artist from the world of dance to receive the Order of Canada. In 1985, she received the highest tribute when she was made a Companion of the Order. She had a long and prolific career in the world of dance, first in England and then in Canada.

"Celia Franca led the way in the development of a truly Canadian dance scene," said Canada Council Chair Karen Kain. "She devoted her life to dance and inspired generations of dancers by her example and commitment to the art of ballet. She also worked for the benefit of all artists as an active member of the Canada Council board. We will remember a person whose artistic vision and integrity contributed to the Canadian artistic landscape to help make it what it is today."

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Important Notices